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THE EIGHTH BIENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS.

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The eighth biennial convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs was held in St. Paul, Minnesota, May 30 to June 8, 1906. This meeting is well worth the attention of the student of social and political science, presenting, as it does, the growth and development of a great movement. From every section of the United States, with an occasional friend from across the border or from over the seas, came the two thousand delegates and visitors. Even a casual glance told the spectator that these were representative women, the happy grandmothers, mothers, wives and daughters, who stand for the best and sanest in American home and social life. The middle aged woman was strongly in evidence, but some of the most capable and most beautiful members had passed the three score mark, and many were still in the flush of youth. The general air was one of modest prosperity; in federation circles the woman of limited means makes no apology, the woman of wealth avoids all ostentation.

The sessions of this convention presented a four-fold aspect, the first being the business side. So excellent were the arrangements of the local committees, that there was no confusion as to meeting trains, delivering baggage promptly (no small item in a woman's conventions), obtaining credentials, securing information and seating delegates. The meetings began on time and ended on time. The order was excellent. The reports of the officers and working committees were clear and concise, while the minutes were models of their kind. The revision of the By-laws was accomplished with no loss of time or temper. Even the nominating committee and the election of officers passed without an unpleasant word. Motions were sound and practical, there was a delightful absence of

"making talk." Nothing was more interesting than to watch the faces of the delegates, when once in a great while, some injudicious speaker took the floor to urge her cause; there was an air of kind, courteous tolerance, a disposition to be open-minded, but beneath it all one saw the sturdy common sense, the sound judgment of the masses, and when the vote came, the true interest of the federation, as she saw it, was the one impelling power for each delegate. There was honest difference of opinion, but there was almost no personal feeling. When one reflects that the federation is only fifteen years old and that each convention presents a host of new delegates, this business development speaks much for the practical training club life has given women.

The second aspect may be called the educational, the hard-working, the bone and sinew side, represented by reports from chairmen of fourteen standing committees, these chairmen being reinforced by famous experts as speakers. It was fascinating to trace, varied as these committees seemed, how they all touched the home; this is the centripetal force that speaks volumes for the future of the federation. The Civil Service Committee made this resolution its center of attack: Believing that practical knowledge and ability are necessary in the care of the defective and delinquent, and realizing that the management of State institutions for these unfortunate classes should be in accordance with the most advanced views of economy and efficiency, be it

"Resolved, That the General Federation of Women's Clubs devote itself for the next two years to securing the enactment of State laws which shall place all officials and employees of the charitable and reformatory institutions of the United States under the merit system of appointment." In the discussion delegates showed that they unanimously favored this because it meant more peace, more comfort for the delinquents and defectives, thus meaning more happiness for the homes of these unfortunates. The Reciprocity Committee presented plans whereby the strong club could help the weak, the town could learn from the country and the country from the town, each section could gain from the other. The course of study could be made so strong, and yet so attractive, that each member of the club woman's family would be interested, the tone of conversation would be raised and the solidarity of the home strengthened. The convention established at a cost of \$2,000 per

year a Bureau of Information, to aid in bringing about this desired consummation. The Library Extension Committee showed the marvellous work of traveling libraries, sent out in nearly every state by the influence of club organizations. These cases of books have brought happiness, inspiration and opportunity to the home and school all over our country. In trenchant terms the Civic Committee set forth the duty of women in home and municipal sanitation; practical methods of abating the smoke nuisance, of securing clean streets, healthful school buildings, proper milk and meat inspection were given with the authority of one who had brought things to pass. The Committee on Education brought out the need of more compulsory education laws, of better and more beautiful school buildings, of play-grounds, of more normal schools, of more expert supervision, of the training of the hand, and above all of right character building, which is the real test of home and school efficiency.

The Forestry Committee swept every woman on a wave of impassioned oratory to the firm belief that she had a pressing duty towards "Man's faithful servant and constant friend, the Forest," that no child was rightly educated unless he learned from mother and teacher:

"Woods were made for hunters of dreams,
And the streams for the fisher of song,
To those who hunt for the gunless game,
The streams and the woods belong.

There are thoughts that moan from the soul of the pine
And thoughts in the flower bell curled,
And thoughts that are blown with the scent of the fern
Are as new and as old as the world."

The following resolution was passed with enthusiasm:

"*Resolved*, That the General Federation of Women's Clubs continue the support of such legislation as shall secure forest reserves in the Appalachian and White Mountains, preserve the integrity of the Minnesota Forest reserve and the Calaveras groves."

It was proved by the Literature Committee that the day of the study club would never pass, that as the federation movement

sprung from the trained mind of true culture, so for each new inspiration we must go to the well-springs of the world's best literature: and that the antidote for the material tendency of the day was to control the reading, thereby controlling the conversation of the home circle.

The Industrial and also the Child Labor Committee made an impassioned appeal for the betterment of the home and working conditions of women and children who toil for daily bread, for a better understanding between the rich and the poor, and for the establishment of juvenile courts. It was decided "to endorse the work of the Industrial Committee in its efforts to secure the passage of a bill to authorize the secretary of commerce and labor to investigate and report upon the industrial, social, moral, educational, and physical condition of the woman and child laborers in the United States."

That many states have barbaric laws regarding property rights of women, that it is the duty of women better to inform themselves on these laws and then have them changed, was clearly established by the Legislative Committee.

The Household Economic and Pure Food Committees presented what had been done during the past two years in each state, showed vividly what must be done and done quickly to secure the passage of the Pure Food Law before Congress. Telegrams were immediately sent by each State President to every member of her delegation in the lower house of Congress, asking for the prompt passage of the law; encouraging replies poured in. History now records that the bill has become a law: will History record how marked a part was played in the securing of this law by the General Federation?

In addition to these morning sessions every committee was given an afternoon hour for a free conference; here the delegates and visitors had an opportunity to exchange experiences; so interested were both speakers and listeners that it was difficult to secure adjournment. A model flat, pure food exhibits, display of artistic pottery and metal work, handicraft from various schools, displays from individual states, and the federation art gallery were on exhibition at the old Capitol to the edification of hundreds.

If the day was filled with problems so serious as to oppress the conscientious woman with the burden of duty and responsibility,

the evening programs might well be called inspiring vistas from the mountain tops. The first night was given to speeches of welcome, when the highest dignitaries of church, state, school and club poured into the crystal loving-cup of hospitality their choicest vintage. Next came three minute reports from the Presidents of State federations, answering "Watchman, what of the night?" As these forty-six women, standing for forty-six types, forty-six localities, forty-six sets of interests, brought message after message of good cheer, brought accounts of *deeds done*, not of words spoken,—she were a dullard indeed, who did not gratefully say, "With God's help all things are indeed possible to us."

"Our Opportunities" was the night that proved it is "the opportunity of every American citizen to co-operate with every other American citizen, no matter how widely separated are their social spheres." Settlement Work, The Consumers' League, the Press, National Municipal League, American Civic Association, Juvenile Courts, National Child Labor Committee, International Sunshine Society—these were the topics that widened the horizon and sent each listener away feeling it a privilege to be allowed to share such opportunities.

The third evening preached the gentle gospel of Art, demonstrated that art is a social dynamic, lifted the audience from the practical and material into the ideal and the spiritual.

An original idea was the musical program devoted to Women Composers, the interpreters being artists of national reputation. Nothing was more enjoyed during the Biennial.

"Women in the Professions" gave an intimate glimpse into the experiences of women who are successful in education, journalism, ministry, law, medicine, and the stage: wit and wisdom kept the audience in a constant state of delight.

For President's Night Mrs. Decker chose the motto, "East, West, Home's Best": A woman from each of the four sections pictured the life, the needs, the achievement of her people, while the President bound the four into one composite whole. The Key-note of this program from the first spoken word, through the exquisite music rendered, "Land of the Moccasin Flower" for the North, "Old Kentucky Home" for the South, "Pilgrim Fathers" for the East, "Land of the West" for the West, and "Home Sweet Home" for every one, was patriotism, the highest patriotism that

blazons on the shield of each not North, nor South, nor East, nor West, but the *one* word that means all of these, the word we love, *America*.

On Sunday came the beautiful vesper service when old hymns that have stood the test of generations were sung, when a few earnest, helpful words were spoken, then the tear-stained eye, the trembling lip, the solemn hush bespoke the moral uplift that came to those who shared that blessed hour.

In the life of a well rounded woman external beauty and social amenities can not be omitted. This was the fourth aspect of the Biennial. The artistic decoration of the place of meeting,—a genuine creation that deserves to be ranked as a model for future committees—the cordial receptions in the best private homes of St. Paul, the magnificent hospitality of Governor and Mrs. Johnson in the new State Capitol, the *al fresco* entertainment at the Falls of Minnehaha and the Country Club,—all these added a finishing touch to the picture.

While all other names have been omitted from this article, yet no account of the Eighth Biennial Convention can go on record without a word of appreciation for the loving and beloved President, Mrs. Sarah S. Platt-Decker.

“It has been the woman’s part since the beginning to put into the world beauty, regeneration, and uplifting. These are the things we shall speak of this week. These are the purposes for which we have met.”

From these eloquent opening words of her response to the addresses of welcome, through every hour of the long convention she was the ideal presiding officer.